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BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN SOME OF ITS THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONS.

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II.

We have now reached the point where it becomes evident that this sketch of the speculative Christology held by the philosophers from Kant to Hegel has an important bearing upon the subject of modern criticism and theology. David F. Strauss forced the question of the historical reality of Christ into the foreground although his own answer was in the negative. He was a pupil of Hegel in Berlin until Hegel died in 1831. Then Strauss heard Schleiermacher. So two highly speculative and powerful minds influenced Strauss who adopted the philosophy of the one and was directed to the gospels by the other. Hegel's distinction between the *notion* as philosophy and the *idea* as religion, which were said to be formally but not materially different, troubled him. Strauss was a student of Scripture and he could not help asking: Do the gospels belong merely to the covering, the envelope, of the *idea* which is capable of being torn off by reason from the inner pure thought? Or, do the gospels and their meaning form an essential part of the material alike in both *notion* and *idea*, in philosophy and in religion? Is the person of Christ a mere element in the form and so not essential? Or, has he value for the matter, the notion, speculative thought? Assuming the Hegelian doctrine of the Absolute, Strauss then asked: can I not with the critical method work the life of Jesus as it is set forth in the gospels into harmony with the Hegelian philosophy? This he accomplished but only by attributing all that was supernatural in the life of Christ to myth and legend, leaving only a pure and wise man.

Strauss was attacked from all sides; by Hegelians who believed

that he misrepresented Hegel; and by many theologians such as Neander, Ullmann, Tholuck, Hengstenberg and others. These men maintained the gospel record of Christ as real in history. From this time forward the speculative construction of the life of Christ gave place to questions concerning the nature and reliability of the sacred literature and to Christ's historical reality as the chief problem.

An important factor in the renewed investigation of Scripture was the Tübingen school under the leadership of Baur. Agreeing with Strauss in his philosophical views Baur yet looked at the problem otherwise. With Baur, the problem was to understand Christ, not, as with Strauss, to explain him away. He wished to escape Strauss' mythical theory which was unscientific because Strauss had not applied the principles of criticism to the gospels themselves and neglected the fact of Christ's existence. Baur gave Christ so much positive importance in history that the tendency was to acknowledge his historical reality.¹ The school of Baur revived the knowledge of the early church and forced New Testament criticism to become a science; but, while it gave much importance to Christ, it was so philosophical that it failed to come face to face with Christ as the creator of Christianity.

The fact which has the most importance for this discussion is that the reaction against Strauss, and later against the Tübingen school marked the beginning of a new epoch in religious thought and biblical science. It created the school of Neander and others inspired by a like spirit, who sought to give both the Old and the New Testaments their true place and to recognize Christ's historical reality fully. I believe that the evangelical critic in his opposition to the rationalist concerning the whole Bible is fairly called the representative of this new movement.

I have now reached the point of view which enables me to show more clearly the already implied distinction between the rationalist and the evangelical critic. We have traced the move-

¹ It was the Hegelian principle, out of difference and contradiction, unity comes; thesis Jesus, of Nazareth as Messiah; antithesis, Jesus as Christ, the Saviour of the world; synthesis, the Catholic Church with its law, priesthood and ceremonial for all. In this historical sketch, I acknowledge my indebtedness to the able work of A. M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, N. Y., 1893.

ment of speculative thought from English deism, through France to the rationalism of Germany. We saw what prominence was given to natural laws in a mechanical view of the world. Supplementary to this view of the world was the mathematical method or theory of knowledge for the first time clearly expressed in the Discourse on Method by Descartes, reappearing in Spinoza, then in Leibnitz with some modifications whose teachings were popularized by Wolf resulting in the generally accepted principle that every truth to be accepted must be capable of demonstration and positive proof. Then followed the speculations concerning Christ and Christianity from Kant to Hegel and Strauss, resulting, as has been shown, in the entire loss of the historical reality of Christ.

It is difficult to fix upon any one of the systems of the past as characteristic of the thought of the present. But I think we are safe in affirming that the rationalistic critic, such as Reuss, Kuenen, and Wellhausen, is one in whom the speculations I have reviewed find a representative. For example: Why should any critic of either Testament rule out the supernatural and the miraculous as impossible? ¹ Has he not made the assumption that the universe is a closed system in which natural law is an inviolable something forbidding all interference from without, that in this world from the first was all that afterwards became manifest? That Christianity was in the world in germ from the beginning? Or, speaking less according to the deist and more after the manner of Schelling and Hegel, that there can be no supernatural manifested in a particular Christ for all is supernatural, and supernatural is natural because the incarnation of the Absolute is universal, that is pantheism?

Again, men like Reuss, Kuenen and Wellhausen, attempt a reconstruction of Jewish literature and history prompted by speculative assumptions perhaps unconsciously made. Everything in the history of Israel must be in harmony with logical development. A full revelation of a complete body of Levitical laws to

¹ See A. B. Bruce, *Apologetics*, N. Y., 1892, p. 497f. for a good discussion of present thought. Also James Martineau's work, *The Seat of Authority in Religion*, whose object is to show that the authority in religion is God immanent in human reason.

Moses would have been a violation of the steady syllogistic unfolding of the idea in history for, as Hegel said, the actual must always be the rational. I find also a remnant of the Leibnitz-Wolfian theory of knowledge, namely, prove everything with mathematical exactness and reject all that does not admit of such demonstration. The supernatural and the miraculous factors in Judaism and Christianity do not admit such demonstration and consequently must be rejected.

If the rationalistic critic has such assumptions and prejudices, he differs widely from the evangelical critic. The latter assumes that the supernatural and the miraculous in religion are not only possible but actual. This of course is not a deistical position. Nor are we in these days shut up to the deistic or even the Hegelian view of the world. To-day such a philosophy as that of Lotze, a theistic monism, serves the evangelical critic better because it provides for the possibility of the miracle¹ and because it is more true to life and history. The theory of development which lies at the basis of evangelical criticism in its application to progressive revelation is not logical but morphological and biological—life acting and reacting and adjusting itself to its environment.²

Especially does the evangelical critic differ from the rationalist in assuming that there is a divine authority in the Scriptures. He proceeds to "inquire what the Scriptures teach about themselves and to separate this divine authority from all other authority."³ Consequently, his criticism does not concern inspiration directly which is assumed. These Christian scholars also set a limit to their results by their fidelity to Scripture; for "they admit freely that the traditional beliefs as to the dates and origin of the several books may be brought in question without involving any doubt as to their inspiration, yet confidently affirm that any theories of

¹ Lotze, *Microcosmus* II., 479 ff. Lotze makes the possibility of the miracle dependent upon the close and intimate action and reaction between the world and the personal Absolute in consequence of which the movements of the natural world are carried on only *through* the Absolute with the possibility of a variation in the general course of things according to existing facts and the purposes of the divine Governor.

² H. Spencer's conception of development expressed in his works on biology and sociology is instructive at this point.

³ C. A. Briggs, *Biblical Study*, N. Y., 1883, p. 171.

the origin or authorship of any book of either Testament which ascribes to them a purely naturalistic genesis, or dates, or authors inconsistent with either their own natural claims or the assertions of other Scripture are plainly inconsistent with the doctrine of inspiration taught by the church."¹ Despite some differences in results this is the general position of the evangelical critic with reference to the authority of the Scripture.

It must now be clear that the differences between the rationalist and the evangelical critic have nothing to do with the principles of higher criticism which are necessarily common to both parties. But the differences depend upon the assumptions and prejudices with which each approaches the Scriptures. We are, therefore, shut up to a choice, not between different principles and methods of literary criticism, but between the assumptions and prejudices of the rationalist and those of the evangelical critic.

If we decide with the evangelical critic, we are pledged to a warfare against the rationalist according to the principles of higher criticism and within the limit already given. *Christian* scholars who strive bitterly against each other, simply miss the question at issue. When certainty as to the meaning of Scripture has been reached according to the principles of critical investigation, let it be put over against the rationalistic negations without fear of successful contradiction; let it be brought into a theology whose philosophical basis is so firm and so true that the conclusions of rationalism shall be forever untenable.

Finally, I wish to show that biblical criticism by emphasizing the human factor in Scripture and by directing attention to the humanity of Christ as a real character of history has done much towards making a true philosophy of Christianity possible. It is doubtful whether there is any *science* of religion prepared to offer to philosophy facts and principles for consideration and unification. Rather does philosophy have to go directly to human life

¹ *Presbyterian Review*, II., 244. It is an interesting fact that this limit to criticism was accepted by the participants in the discussion of 1882 and 1883 in which very different views were expressed. For list of disputants, see Briggs, *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch*, N. Y., 1893, p., 130.

as a whole for its facts and principles in order to form a philosophy of religion. In this appeal to human nature, it is found that religion embraces the whole intellectual and spiritual nature and is not unrelated to the physical. A philosophy of religion must take cognizance of such facts as the following: (*a*) a vague feeling of complete dependence which with Schleiermacher was the source of the religious life; (*b*) the feeling and idea of moral obligation; (*c*) the feeling for the not merely useful but also for the beautiful; (*d*) "the metaphysical impulse which demands a cause of recurrent groupings of experience, a "substratum," a Being in the world of reality;" (*e*) "the unifying of all experience in some known or postulated unity of reality."¹ These facts the philosophy of religion must consider together with that higher and yet concrete representation of them by which ethical laws become the will of God, individual finite spirits not mere products of nature but children of God, actuality not a mere course of the world but the kingdom of God.² Thus the philosophy of religion concerns man in his constant relations and interchange of life with the personal God in which communion the personality of each is preserved; for religion is God the Father in constant vital relation with the children of men; "for in Him we live and move and have our being; as certain also of our own poets have said, "For we are also his offspring."

If such an understanding of religion be correct, no inspiration of sacred writers would remove their personal characteristics and their fallibility. In their productions, we may expect errors growing out of their limitations and peculiarities, yet errors not conflicting with the essential revelation; we may expect the whole religious life to show the presence of God in the developing human life. The human side of religion would never be lost sight of.

Has the higher criticism contributed anything towards the proper recognition of the human side of religion as well as the divine? It has done so, first, because it has made the Bible a

¹ G. T. Ladd, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Chap. XIII.

² Lotze, *Philosophy of Religion*, Tr. Sec. 80. See also Ed. von Hartmann's *Die Religion des Geistes*, for an able and suggestive analysis of religious life even in an un-christian philosophy.

book of *life* as it has been lived in the great movements of history. "Fresh light from the ancient monuments," the examination of the sacred writings and other sources of information have given to the Old Testament a new reality and vividness as the record of man's emotions, thoughts and hopes while he lived consciously in the closest relations with the personal God. Secondly, criticism has filled up the traditional gap of centuries between the Old and the New Testaments, and shown that God did not leave Israel without guidance when she needed it most under the Persian and the Greek yoke exposed to other religions and civilizations. But this was impossible on the traditional view which assigns all the law to Moses, all psalms to David, all the wisdom to Solomon. But there were many writers, and God was with Israel in that long period of waiting for the Messiah. From David on to the Maccabæan period, Israel was singing and praying, not backsliding. The heart of the people responded to the law of God in sacred psalms full of devotion.¹ So criticism shows, on the one hand, that there was a constant religious activity in Israel; and, on the other hand, that there was an unbroken continuity in divine revelation until the summit was reached in Jesus Christ and his apostles. Thus criticism has done much to open the way to a true philosophy of the Christian religion by compelling a fuller recognition of the human as well as divine side of religion.

Also in emphasizing the humanity of Christ, the same service to the philosophy of religion has been rendered. The reaction against Strauss removed the far away theological Christ and restored to the religious life the Christ of the Gospels, Jesus, our loving, suffering Lord and Saviour. Jesus as human shares all the changes and weaknesses apart from sin incident to the earthly life. All that I wish to maintain in this connection is that the return to the human Saviour is not only in the line of what we might expect, since religion is the specific expression of the relations of men and God, but also in the line of what must be if there is to be a true philosophy of the Christian religion. If we

¹ C. A. Briggs, *The Bible, the Church and the Reason*, 148 ff.; also S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, N. Y., 1892, p. 351 f., 363 f., 467 f., as examples.

lose sight of the human element of revelation, its adaptation to life as it has been and is, we enter the path to a speculative Christology which will rob us of the real Saviour. We must have the actual, pitying Jesus. If critical investigation has established the basis of our belief in such a Saviour more firmly, we should have only gratitude to those scholars who have so skilfully accomplished their task.

In conclusion, shall we, while seeking the true philosophy of the Christian religion, entirely forget those marvelous speculations and Christologies from Kant to Hegel in which the supreme life of spirit was found in religion, and religion became the final problem? We may not be satisfied with Hegel's "*Das Andere ist bestimmt als Sohn*"¹ or even with Baur's *thesis*; but shall we lose sight of the impressive thought, which certainly was Hegel's, that Christ is the center of the truest philosophy of religion? If the life of Israel set forth in the Old Testament had its goal in the first advent of the Messiah; if prophecy also centers in the second coming of Christ; if he is the head of the church, and the director of the destinies of mankind; if all history actually moves on towards the consummation of his kingdom; if, finally, the essence of religion is the relation and the communion of men and God, Jesus Christ, the human divine Saviour, must be the alpha and omega of religion, and the philosophy of religion must be the philosophy of Christ.

If the Christian religion is ultimate; if "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain with us," yearning for the fulfillment of the purposes, the philosophy of all nature and spirit must be in some sense the philosophy of Christ.

¹ Hegel's *Werke*, XII. p. 206.